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ABSTRACT

Despite the blizzard of reform activity since 1983, neither state legislation nor state education department mandates have diminished the failure rates of at-risk youngsters. One-third of all elementary students are at risk of failing academically. This paper reviews past state department of education reform efforts and suggests innovative ways for states to accelerate the learning of high risk students. The accelerated school, as envisioned and implemented by Henry Levin and associates, invites school staffs to use their expertise, interest, and resources to restructure their schools' organization, curriculum, and instructional practices. Such schools seek to make all youngsters academically able by the time they leave sixth grade. Accelerated school communities abide by three guiding principles: (1) unity of purpose; (2) empowerment to make and implement important decisions; and (3) willingness to alter perceptions of themselves and their students by building on strengths. At present, 39 schools in California, Illinois, Missouri, and Utah have adopted accelerated school concepts. State department educators in Illinois and Missouri are creating accelerated school networks and are making the shift from enforcer to supporter. Other state-level educators are beginning to see themselves as collaborators rather than regulators. These officials are facilitating real reforms by assuming new roles as catalysts, brokers, coordinators, ombudsmen, coaches, publicists, and demographers. Several cautions and challenges for states are presented, along with an agenda for the 1990s. (Nine references) (MLH)

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Implementing Accelerated Schools: Issues at the State Level

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IMPLEMENTING ACCELERATED SCHOOLS: ISSUES AT THE STATE LEVEL

Introduction

Today, one in three youngsters sitting in America's elementary classrooms is at risk of failing academically (Catterall & Cota-Robles, 1988; Levin, 1988). Indeed, many children are already failing to learn how to read, calculate, and think. They hate school and look for ways to leave it as soon as possible. More than half will drop out of school before receiving a high school diploma (Levin, 1986). Because they lack the resources and experiences schools require for academic success, these students are growing into adults who will join the "have-nots" of our society. They will have no skills, no job, no future.

What can be done to turn this situation around? How can we accelerate the learning of these at-risk youngsters? How can we give them "academic running shoes," close the achievement gap and keep it closed?

In this paper, I will first review past efforts by state departments of education to remedy these dire circumstances of school failure. Next, I will suggest some innovative ways that states can accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters. Finally, I will examine the challenges states face and will offer suggestions for state-sponsored reform efforts during the 1990's.

Past State Efforts in Reforming Education

States legislatures have not sat idly by as at-risk youngsters have failed year after year. Since the publication of The Nation At Risk report in 1983, state politicians have generated a "blizzard of reform activity," (Timar and Kirp, 1989, p. 506). Legislatures have sought to halt the spiral of failure by passing mandates affecting almost all aspects of public schooling. State governments across the United States have passed legislation raising high school graduation standards, demanding teacher competencies, establishing merit pay systems for teachers, requiring student competencies, prescribing curriculum changes, requiring longer school days and school years, and specifying certain instructional approaches teachers must use.

Taking their cues from the politicians, state education officials have generated mountains of detailed rules and regulations designed to implement this "blizzard of reform," (Timar and Kirp, 1989, p. 506). Furthermore, state departments of education have created elaborate monitoring and enforcement systems to ensure that schools indeed follow the mandates.

But these policies and mandates are not making a dent in the failure rates of at-risk youngsters (Timar and Kirp, 1989). Instead, these efforts have sought to force schools to reform "by remote control" (Levin, 1988, p. 28). Real reform, reform that makes a difference for at-risk students, simply isn't happening (Levin, 1988; McDill, Natriello, and Pallas, 1985).

An Alternative

The Accelerated School, as envisioned and implemented by Henry Levin and his colleagues across the United States, provides an alternative approach. Rather than mandating reform "by remote control," (Levin, 1988, p. 28), Levin and his colleagues invite school staffs to use their own expertise, interest, and resources to fundamentally restructure their schools to accelerate the learning of their students. These schools seek to make all youngsters, even those who are at-risk for failure, academically able by the time they leave sixth grade. All members of the school community -- teachers, principals, parents -- work together to fulfill this overarching goal.

To reach this goal, the members of the Accelerated School community draw on their own expertise, common sense and research-proven strategies to change the organization, curriculum and instructional practices of their schools. Furthermore, they keep three principles at the forefront of all their activities. First, they strive to maintain a *unity of purpose* in all that they do. Members of the school community make sure that all activities of the Accelerated School help further the school's vision for it's students. Second, teachers, principals, and parents are *empowered to make important decisions* about the school's curriculum, instructional practices and organization for learning and decision-making. Furthermore, members of the school community assume a real sense of responsibility for making these decisions happen. Finally, members of the Accelerated School community alter their perceptions of themselves and their students. Rather than focusing on the deficits, they *build on the strengths* of their students, their colleagues, their community as

they restructure the curriculum, instruction and organization of their school.

At present, 39 elementary schools in California, Illinois, Missouri, and Utah have adopted the concepts of the Accelerated School. The two pilot schools in California began their efforts of accelerating the learning of their students in the Spring of 1987. One year later, the state of Missouri began a network of six Accelerated Schools. This network has since expanded to nine schools. Three schools in Salt Lake City, Utah, initiated their efforts during the Fall of 1988, and Illinois launched a network of 25 Accelerated Schools in January, 1989.

Opportunities for States

This development of Accelerated Schools across the country provides unique opportunities for state departments of education to proactively support schools making these reform efforts. Rather than concentrating their reform efforts on monitoring and enforcing state mandates, state department officials have the opportunity to shift more of their efforts towards helping schools accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters. In other words, state department educators can and, indeed, should find ways to support change rather than simply enforcing compliance.

Two states, Illinois and Missouri have accepted this challenge and have begun to make the shift from enforcer to supporter. State department educators in these two states have seized the initiative and created a network of Accelerated Schools within their borders. Various state-level directors and consultants are beginning to see themselves as collaborators with school-site staffs in solving problems, rather than simply regulators of rules, mandates, and policies.

They are helping to effect real reform by assuming new roles that support the Accelerated Schools in their reform efforts. These new roles fall into seven categories: (a) catalyst, (b) broker, (c) coordinator, (d) ombudsman, (e) coach, (f) publicist, and (g) demographer.

All of these roles currently are played to some extent by some persons in the state departments across the country, but the primary function of many state department employees is enforcement, not support. The overall thrust needs to shift more towards supportive roles and away from enforcement roles. In the next section, I will describe these supportive roles and use examples from Illinois and Missouri to show how these roles can be played out in practice.

New Roles for State Department Personnel

(a) *Catalyst* : Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1981) defines a catalyst as "an agent that provokes or precipitates" action. Rather than forcing reforms on schools, state departments can act as *catalysts* for reform by creating the impetus and enthusiasm among schools to embark on the reform process. Many states already disseminate innovative ideas through state newsletters, state-wide conferences, and state-sponsored staff development workshops for local schools, but these efforts need to be stepped up and should become a primary focus for the state, rather than an incidental role. Furthermore, state departments need to encourage an atmosphere of experimentation within the state's schools -- an atmosphere that allows those involved to learn from mistakes as well as successes. Barriers to experimentation such as excessive paperwork, implementation plans "carved in stone," and pressure to achieve observable results within one year need to be

softened and eliminated if possible.

In both Illinois and Missouri, state department officials acted as catalysts for reform by sponsoring state-wide awareness conferences and campaigns to disseminate the idea of the Accelerated School. In Missouri, Joan Solomon, Director of Urban Education for the state, invited Henry Levin to give the key note address at the state's first "Students At-Risk" conference held in December, 1987. At that conference, Levin visited with a select group of superintendents who expressed an interest in exploring more successful ways of serving at-risk elementary school students. From this conference and meeting of superintendents came the initial six schools that are currently part of Missouri's state-wide network of Accelerated Schools.

The Illinois State Board of Education officials took a slightly different tact. Linden B. Wharton, Assistant Superintendent for School Improvement Services, heard Levin speak about Accelerated Schools at a conference during 1986. He was intrigued by the concept and decided to share Levin's ideas with districts across the state. In early 1987, he invited Levin to speak at the state's annual conference for Chapter I teachers. In 1988, his staff prepared a packet of information about Accelerated Schools and sent these packets out to over 100 school districts that had schools serving high concentrations of Chapter I students. Wharton and his staff hoped that at least eight schools would be equally intrigued by the Accelerated School ideas and elect to join a small network similar to Missouri's. These initial awareness materials on the Accelerated School elicited not just eight schools, but 25. Wharton decided not to turn anyone away and in January, 1989, the Illinois State

Board held the first of several state-wide training sessions to launch a network of Accelerated Schools.

In both states, state department officials acted as the catalyst for reform by sharing ideas and *inviting* school staffs to embark on reform efforts rather than dictating what reforms had to be made. In both states, state educators shared ideas and offered schools the opportunity to participate, but allowed teachers and principals to make the decision about joining the network. Both states continue to play the role of catalysts by sponsoring state-wide conferences, showcasing innovative ideas, distributing an Accelerated Schools newsletter, and sending staff from network schools to national conferences and workshops to gather new ideas.

(b) *Broker* : Because of their highly visible positions, state department officials often times find themselves in situations where they can act as brokers between schools and resources. State department personnel can help garner resources (people, equipment, materials and money) by connecting schools with foundations, corporations, universities, publishers, and private individuals. This brokering of resources and schools already occurs in most state departments of education, but again, it often assumes only an incidental, rather than primary emphasis. To truly support reform efforts, state department officials must assume the role of broker and actively seek to connect schools with resources.

In Missouri, Solomon helped secure the Danforth Foundation grants that currently support the four Accelerated Schools in the St. Louis area. In Illinois, Wharton and his staff have helped connect the Accelerated Schools with various projects sponsored by Scholastic, Inc., National Geographic, U. S. Robotics and IBM.

Indeed, the projects involving National Geographic, U.S. Robotics, and IBM illustrate how crucial the role of broker can be. In Spring of 1989, Wharton's school improvement department had just awarded National Geographic a grant to develop an elementary curriculum on scientific literacy. At the same time, several staff members were discussing the creation of a electronic network between the state's Accelerated Schools with representatives from IBM and the spouse of a state board member who worked with U.S. Robotics, makers of modems.

"It was serendipity," explains Dianne Ashby, an educational consultant with the school improvement department. "We were all sitting around over lunch one day and said 'Why not combine all three?'" As a result of this brokering of resources, the Illinois Accelerated Schools are now on the verge of implementing a scientific literacy curriculum that features not only simulated, interactive environments, but also links students to students and teachers to teachers across the Accelerated Schools network using computers and modems.

(c) *Coordinator*: As with the roles already discussed, the role of coordinator is not a non-existent feature in state departments of education. Indeed, many state education personnel carry the title "coordinator," but as before, more effort is put into ensuring compliance with mandates than coordinating activities. If true reform is to occur in schools serving at-risk youngsters, the balance between compliance and coordination must shift more in favor of coordination. States, because of their overarching structure and access to resources, are sometimes better able to embark on certain efforts than single districts by themselves. For example, state department personnel can more easily launch a state-wide evaluation of

Accelerated Schools than can a single school. Furthermore, state departments can coordinate the use of scarce resources to ensure their optimum use.

This is particularly, true when it comes to training. In Missouri, Solomon was able to combine federal, state, and local funds to sponsor a summer academy on reading instruction for staffs from Missouri's Accelerated Schools. No one school could have afforded all the expenses, but by pooling the funds from all the schools and the state, all benefited from the training.

Finally, state department staff, because of their centralized positions, can provide the structure and impetus for a collective effort on the part of the various schools. Efforts that would be nearly impossible to accomplish for one school alone become very feasible when a network of schools acts together. For example, the Illinois State Board staff, through its coordinating efforts, helped the 25 Accelerated Schools forge a network steering committee that has secured various grants for all the network schools, created a network newsletter, and established a state-wide system for disseminating information on available resources.

(d) *Ombudsman* : All successful superintendents know that cultivating special relationships with a handful of strategically placed state department officials provides insurance for the day that they will need someone to help "cut through the bureaucratic red tape" or "bend the regs a bit." These "smart" superintendents create a cadre of ombudsmen who can deal effectively with other sections of the state department. State department officials play the role of ombudsman on occasion, but rarely do they see this role as part of their formal job description. If state departments want to truly support schools in their reform efforts, state officials

must come to see that being an ombudsman to schools is indeed part of their role.

At the Illinois State Board of Education in Springfield, Illinois, Wharton, as Assistant Superintendent of School Improvement Services, has formalized the ombudsman role of several state board employees. He encouraged state department employees to adopt one of the Accelerated Schools. Currently, each of the 25 Accelerated Schools has a "friend inside the bureaucracy," explained Ashby, an educational consultant with the department. "This person may not be able to answer the questions or concerns the school has, but can sure find someone who can."

In Missouri, Solomon, as Director of Urban Education, has become the person the nine Missouri Accelerated Schools turn to whenever they run into difficulty getting permission to do various innovative activities under the existing federal and state regulations. She successfully helped several Accelerated Schools receive permission to try an innovative procedure for serving Chapter I students, a procedure that had not yet been tried in other Missouri schools.

(e) *Coach* : State departments across the country all have cadres of personnel who coach schools in how to improve their curriculum, their instruction, and their administration. These "consultants," as they are often titled, provide schools with technical assistance about all aspects of schools from how to figure a budget to how to teach reading to first graders. Again, however, the state's role as enforcer of compliance often overshadows its role as provider of technical assistance.

Besides providing technical assistance, coaching can also involve creative

problem solving, helping schools find innovative ways to meet challenges. State department personnel need to adopt a "can-do" attitude that puts this type of coaching at the center of every state department educator's job. Not only can state officials coach teachers and principals in the best ways to deal effectively with other sections of the state department, with foundations, with grant officers, and with school patrons, they can also coach schools in how to overcome bureaucratic barriers and creatively solve problems.

Members of Wharton's staff in Illinois and Solomon in Missouri have assumed the role of coaches to the states' networks of Accelerated Schools. They have connected schools with experts who can provide the technical assistance the teachers need to successful accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters. They have also tried hard to adopt the "can do" attitude so necessary for successful implementation. Instead of just responding, "No, you can't do that. It's against the rules," state educators ask school staffs, "What are you trying to achieve?" and together the state educator and the school-site educators discover ways to meet "the letter of the law" and still achieve the goal for students.

(f) *Publicist* : Every state department of education in the United States has some type of public relations office. The staffs in these offices have well developed contacts with newspapers, radio stations and television stations throughout the state. The state's public relations teams can generate support for the reform efforts of Accelerated Schools by showcasing the schools in the state publications, radio and television broadcasts and news releases. Furthermore, state department officials can boost the reform efforts of Accelerated Schools by exposing those who control school

funding to the activities of Accelerated Schools. If legislators, state board members, and foundation officers are aware of the efforts schools are making to accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters, they are often more likely to smile kindly upon future budget requests.

Indeed, such publicity has paid off in both Illinois and Missouri. Recently, the Illinois State Board of Education allocated $2.4 million dollars for school improvement activities. Some of this money is earmarked to support staff training in the state's network of Accelerated School. Up to this point, the state's Accelerated School activities have operated on "nothing" but hard work and "found funds, explained one staff member.

In Missouri, the Danforth Foundation and the Monsanto Foundation have awarded substantial grants to further the efforts of the state's Accelerated Schools. Furthermore, the publicity has prompted numerous schools in both states to explore more fully the ideas behind the Accelerated School. Teachers and principals are now taking stock of their schools and requesting to join the networks.

(g) *Demographer* : Statistics and state departments of education go hand in hand. Every state department collects reams of data from districts on all aspects of schooling. Data on student achievement, teacher experience, teacher salaries, school lunches served, socio-economic status of students and staff, expenditures, racial and ethnic background, and expulsions are just a few of the statistics gleaned each year from schools districts. State statisticians compile this mountain of data and often publish them in some document akin to "the State of Education in the State."

For most teachers and principals, such statistics are interesting, but rarely helpful when it comes to making decisions on how best to educate at-risk youth. Rather than functioning as keepers of statistics, state department must become keepers of *meaningful* statistics. In addition to the current mass of data they collect, state department statisticians can collaborate with schools to discover the kind of data that will help school staffs make informed decisions about their schools and their efforts at implementing reforms. Furthermore, states need to establish a clear definition of what it means to be at-risk and collect data that accurately depicts the quantity and distribution of at-risk children (Levin, 1988). Finally, state department officials can devise assessment systems that provide schools with meaningful feedback about their efforts to accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters. Assessment experts at the state level should invest effort in finding ways of measuring student achievement and progress that go beyond the traditional norm-referenced, standardized tests. Working in collaboration with school staff, state department personnel can explore evaluation approaches that "have the capability to delineate areas of both progress and continuing problems" (Levin, 1988, p. 213).

Like most states, Illinois and Missouri collect quantities of data on student achievement and characteristics. Both states are only at the talking stage in shifting the state's statistical function to that of providing data that can meaningfully inform the decisions of the teachers and principals in the states' Accelerated Schools. Illinois is currently exploring how best to provide both formative and summative evaluations of the reform efforts implemented by the Accelerated Schools. Missouri

educators at both the state and local level are also grappling with this challenge. Unfortunately, at present no significant action have been taken in either state.

To summarize thus far, I propose that state departments of education stand at a crucial juncture. States can either continue to emphasis the role of enforcer, compelling schools to comply with reform-minded mandates. Or states can shift the balance and begin to play new roles, roles that support and nurture reform rather than merely enforce compliance. Two questions immediately come to mind: What happens to the state's role as the enforcer of compliance and how can states make this shift from being primarily an enforcer of mandates to a supporter of real change?

The State's Role as Enforcer of Mandates

My call for a shift in the primary function of state departments of education is just that -- a shift. I am not advocating a complete dismantling of all monitoring and enforcement functions within the state departments. Rather, I am suggesting that if true reform is to occur in the nation's schools, state departments must shift their emphasis from *forcing* schools to change to *inviting* and *nurturing* schools to change. Systems of monitoring and enforcing compliance will remain as long as state legislatures pass mandates dealing with schools. State departments cannot and, indeed, should not ignore legislative mandates and the legal responsibilities they carry for overseeing the educational activities within the states. However, support, in its broadest meaning, should be the driving force behind the states' efforts.

Shifting Roles for State Department Personnel

The shift in the state department's primary role from enforcer to supporter necessitates a role change for almost all state department personnel. For years, state educators have played the roles of monitors and enforcers. They have grown comfortable in these roles, learning a labyrinthine code of regulations and the demeanor required for enforcing these regulations. The knowledge, skills and values needed by monitors and enforcers are very different than the knowledge, skills and values needed to serve in supporting roles. Knowledge of regulations is helpful, but no longer the primary concern. Rather knowledge of resources, knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and knowledge of possibilities are more important. Evaluation and observational skills are helpful, but no longer of primary concern. Rather skills in coaching, negotiation, and creative problems solving are more important. The push to "do it according to the regs" is still relevant, but more important is the push to "make success happen for kids," to find ways to satisfy regulations AND effect learning for at-risk youngsters. Attitudes must shift from enforcement to coaching, from compliance to creative problem solving.

This role transformation from enforcer to supporter will not come easily, but can be accomplished by applying the three guiding principles of the Accelerated School: unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building on strengths. *Unity of Purpose:* State departments should establish and maintain a *unity of purpose* in all that they do. Like Accelerated schools, state officials should forge a vision of what they want to accomplish for at-risk youth and then evaluate

all state department activities and decisions in light of that vision. State educators should develop the habit of continually asking themselves: "Will this action further the efforts of the Accelerated Schools?" If the answer is "no," state officials should strive to find alternatives that will indeed further the reform efforts of the schools. Furthermore, state educators should guard against working at cross purposes. All divisions and sections of the state should avoid issuing contradictory regulations and rules. They must seek ways to eliminate bureaucratic barriers that block accelerated learning.

The Illinois state department staff working with Accelerated Schools is trying to do just that: they are creating a unity of purpose, guarding against contradictory decisions, and eliminating barriers. Seven persons in Wharton's department of school improvement services spend a portion of their time working with the state's Accelerated Schools. All work in the department of school improvement services, but each works in a different section. One works with Chapter I programs, another with truancy programs, another with alternative schools, another with early childhood, still others with the state's educational service centers, and finally one works with the state's Administrator Academy. To make sure that all their efforts maintain a unity of purpose, these seven people meet weekly. "We work as a collaborative team much as we would ask the schools to do," explained one staff member. These regular meetings not only strengthen creative problem-solving, but also ensure that everyone's efforts support the overall mission for Accelerated Schools.

Empowerment/responsibility: State department personnel, like their counterparts in the schools, possess a wellspring of expertise, concern, and common sense. The state department can tap this wellspring by empowering it's own staff to help make the decisions on what roles they can perform in implementing the state's reform efforts and how they can play out those roles. Such empowerment and "ownership," bolsters the commitment state employees are willing to make towards effecting real reforms for schools serving at-risk youngsters. Not only will they find creative solutions to the challenges posed by reform efforts, but they will also be more willingly assume the responsibility for putting those solutions into action.

Building on strengths : Like the teachers and principals in Accelerated Schools, state department educators should focus on building on strengths rather than singling out deficits. They should reflect on their own personal strengths, as well as those of the department itself and the schools they serve, and use these strengths as a foundation to build new roles for themselves and the department.

Challenges and Cautions

As state-level educators begin to shift their roles from enforcers to supporters, they should keep several cautions in mind: First, they shouldn't expect already over worked state personnel to enthusiastically embrace new roles and reforms. They must think realistically about how to support their colleagues as they grapple with the changes. Such changes take time, training and incentives if they are to be successful. Second, state department officials must actively cultivate a willingness among themselves to trust local school administrators and their staffs. They must abandon the mind set that believes that "if you give schools an inch, they'll take a

mile." They must come to believe that teachers and principals will do what is right for students. Third, state officials must be patient with themselves and the schools as they attempt to implement reforms. Politicians and even state department administrators are often too anxious to see "pay-offs" in just one year. Everyone should remind themselves that real change takes time. An ancient Confucian saying provides wise counsel:

> If your plan is for one year, plant rice;
>
> For ten years, plant trees;
>
> For a hundred years, educate men.

Agenda for Impact in the 1990's

In the summer of 1991, Stanford University and the Smart Foundation will conduct a series of week-long training workshops designed to launch between 20 and 30 new Accelerated Schools across the country. These workshops will create opportunities for developing new networks of schools seeking to accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters. Faced with these opportunities, state departments of education have three choices in how they might deal with these fledgling Accelerated Schools. They can take a supportive role like Missouri and Illinois and nurture these networks, they can take a reactive stance and respond only when asked for help or permission, or they can ignore the Accelerated Schools and treat them like they treat all other schools in the state. I suggest, however, that the best course, the course that will accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters, is the first: to support and nurture the efforts of the Accelerated Schools. State departments of education can provide this support in several ways:

First, state departments can go on record as committed to accelerating the learning of at-risk youngsters and back this commitment with resources (Levin, 1988).

Second, state department educators can assume a new roles as supporters rather than merely enforcers of compliance They can play a variety of supportive roles---catalyst, broker, coordinator, ombudsman, coach, publicist, demographer---all emphasizing support over compliance.

Third, they can find ways to help schools restructure the school day and school year to allow time for training, reflection, group decision making, and interaction among the staff. Rather than building roadblocks to restructuring, state officials can provide suggestions and incentives for schools to restructure (Levin, 1988).

Fourth, they can create a unity of purpose at the state level, forge a shared vision and then evaluate all state-level decisions and actions in light of this vision.

Finally, state departments can use their media clout to educate the public about the needs of at-risk youngsters and the schools that serve them.

State departments of education can make a difference. They can help to accelerate the learning of at-risk youngsters, but to do so, they, like the schools themselves, must fundamentally restructure the way they do business. They must assume new roles -- roles that support and nurture change. They must become supporters rather than enforcers.

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